



Liao~Fan's Four Lessons

Changing One's Destiny

- *Learning to Change Destiny*
- *Ways to Reform*
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- *The Benefits of the Virtue of Humility*

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Liao-Fan's Four Lessons

**By Liao-Fan Yuan of the Ming
Dynasty**

Introduction

Liao-Fan Yuan originally wrote Liao-Fan's Four Lessons in the sixteenth century in China. The book was intended to teach his son, Tian-Chi Yuan, how to recognize the true face of destiny, tell good from bad, correct one's faults and practice kind deeds. It also provided living proof of the rewards and outcomes of people who practiced kind deeds and cultivated virtue and humility. Relating from his own experience at changing destiny, Mr. Yuan himself was a living embodiment of his teachings.

After reading this wonderful book, one may feel more open and confident towards life, and at the same time, courageously compelled to follow the example of Liao-Fan in changing one's original destiny. Liao-Fan's Four Lessons is truly a rare book which is not only precious to an individual's spiritual needs, but is also capable of transforming unhealthy attitudes in today's society.

While reading, one may wonder why the Chinese placed so much emphasis on examinations. In the past, studying was held in highest regard while all other occupations were considered 'low-class.' The Chinese government selected its officials through a system of meritocracy. Many levels of imperial examinations were given to all who wished to take them. It was very difficult to pass these tests and one had to be very learned and talented in writing essays.

Those who did pass had the chance to advance to high government positions and live a life of wealth and prominence. People who could not pass the examinations were not recognized, regardless of how smart or capable they were otherwise. This was why many youths of that time turned to studying for the exams in hopes of a prosperous future.

Since the original work of Liao-Fan was written in classical Chinese, it tended to be hard to read and understand. In the early 1900s, Mr. Zhi-Hai Huang added a detailed commentary to the book using contemporary Chinese. His edition of Liao-Fan's Four Lessons became very popular and benefited many people of his time. However, as time went on, even Mr. Huang's edition became too difficult for today's readers, so the influence of this beneficial book was greatly reduced.

In view of this sad situation, The Foundation of Liao-Fan's Four Lessons, which is dedicated to the reorganization, editing and reprinting of the book, initially sponsored the

editing of The Brief Explanation of Liao-Fan's Four Lessons. As a result they released an updated version of Liao-Fan's Four Lessons as an audio book. The following edition is a further re-editing of the Foundation's initial work. We hope that everyone will learn the spirit of Liao-Fan in changing one's destiny and creating a brighter future for oneself, society, the nation and all the people of this world.

The First Lesson: Learning to Create Destiny

Narrator: 'Creating Destiny' is about forming one's fate rather than being bound by it. The Lesson of Learning to Create Destiny discusses the principle behind fate and the knowledge necessary to change it. By relating his own experiences and trials at changing destiny, Mr. Liao-Fan Yuan taught his son, Tian-Chi, not to be bound by fate, but rather to put forth his best effort in practicing kindness and eradicating wrong-doing.

One should not reject doing a kind act simply because it seems to be a minute goodness or commit a bad deed simply because it appears to be a small wrongdoing. If one practices in a proper manner, it is assured that one's destiny can be changed. It is often said, "Refraining from all wrongdoing and practicing all forms of kindness brings about the reduction of disasters and the coming of good

fortune." This is the principle behind creating one's destiny...

Liao-Fan: My father passed away when I was young and mother persuaded me to learn medicine instead of becoming a scholar.

Mother: Learning medicine will be a good way to support yourself and to help others. Besides, having a skill, you will never have to worry about making a living and you can even become famous through your medical skills. This was always your father's wish for you.

Liao-Fan: One day, at the Compassionate Cloud Temple, I met an elderly but distinguished looking man with a long beard. He had such a look of a sage that I immediately paid my respects to him. The old man told me...

Old Man: You are destined to become a government official. You can attain the rank of Erudite First Level Scholar next year, why aren't you studying for the exam?

Liao-Fan: So I told him of my mother's instructions to give up scholarly study for learning medicine. Then I asked for his name, birthplace and residence. He replied...

Old Man: My last name is Kong. I came from Yunnan Province. I have inherited the knowledge of Mr. Shao, who developed the art of prediction very well. By calculations, I am supposed to pass it on to you.

Liao-Fan: I led Mr. Kong to my home and told my mother about him. Mother told me to treat him well and said...

Mother: Since Mr. Kong is so good at predicting the future, he must also know our past. Let's ask him and test his authenticity.

Liao-Fan: Consequently, I found Mr. Kong's calculations to be very accurate, even in very small cases. After hearing his words of advice, I again thought about studying. I then consulted my cousin Shen-Chen. He recommended...

Cousin: My friend, Mr. Hai-Gu Yu is teaching at the home of Yo-Fu Sheng. It would be very convenient for me to take you there for boarding and studying.

Liao-Fan: This was how I became Mr. Yu's student. Once again, Mr. Kong made a prediction for me.

Mr. Kong: As a student, you will place fourteenth in the county examination, seventy-first in the regional examination and ninth in the provincial examination.

Liao-Fan: The following year, at the three places of examination, I placed exactly as he had predicted. Then Mr. Kong calculated the predictions for my entire life.

Mr. Kong: You will pass such and such a test in such and such a year, you will become a civil servant in such a year and in such a year you will receive a promotion. Finally, you will be appointed as a magistrate in Szechwan Province. After holding that office for three and a half years, you will resign and return home. At the age of fifty-three, you will die around one o'clock in the morning on August 14th. It is a pity that you will not have a son.

Liao-Fan: I recorded and remembered all that he said. From then on, the outcome of every examination I took turned out exactly as Mr. Kong had predicted. Mr. Kong also predicted that I would be promoted only after receiving a salary in the weight of ninety-one *dans* and five *dous* of rice. However, I had received only seventy-one *dans* of rice when the senior educational official, Mr. Tu, recommended me for a promotion. I secretly began to doubt Mr. Kong's predictions.

Liao-Fan: Nevertheless, the prediction turned out to be correct after all, because the recommendation was turned down by Mr. Tu's superior, Mr. Yang. It was not until several years later when Mr. Chiu-Min Ying saw my old exam papers and exclaimed...

Mr. Ying: These five essays are as well written as reports to the Emperor! How can we bury the talents of such a great scholar?

Liao-Fan: Mr. Ying wanted the magistrate to issue an official order for me to become a candidate for 'imperial student' under his authority. After undergoing this eventful promotion, my calculations showed that I had received exactly ninety-one *dans* and five *dous* of rice. From then on, whether it was promotion, rank or wealth, I deeply believed that all came about in due time and that the length of one's life is predestined.

I began to view everything in a more detached manner and ceased to seek gain and profit. After being selected as an

imperial student, I was to attend the university at Beijing. During my yearlong stay at the capital, my interest in meditation grew and I often sat silently without giving rise to a single thought. I lost interest in books and did not study at all.

Before I was to enter the National University at Nanjing, I paid a visit to the enlightened Zen Master Yun-Gu at Chishia Mountain. We sat face to face in the Zen Hall for three days and nights without ever falling asleep. Master Yun-Gu questioned me saying...

Master Yun-Gu: The reason why ordinary people are unable to attain sagehood is because they have too many wandering and false thoughts running through their minds. In our three-day meditation, I have not observed the slightest wandering thought arise in you. Why is this so?

Liao-Fan: I replied, "Mr. Kong has clearly predicted the entire outcome of my life. I have seen that the time of life, death, promotion and failure are all predestined. There is no use or need for me to think about it or to desire anything. That is why you have not seen me give rise to a single wandering thought." Master Yun-Gu laughed.

Master Yun-Gu: I thought you were someone of remarkable capabilities! Now I realize you are nothing but an average, ordinary person!

Liao-Fan: Feeling confused by what he said, I asked the Master to explain.

Master Yun-Gu: An average person's mind is forever occupied by wandering and imaginary thoughts, so naturally their life is bound by the chi of yin and yang as well as fate. We cannot deny the fact that fate exists, but only ordinary people are bound by it. Fate cannot bind those who cultivate great kindness.

Narrator: Because their virtues accrued from kind acts are so great that these acts will alter their 'original' destiny for the better.

Master Yun-Gu: The merits accrued can actually change their destiny from suffering to happiness, poverty to prosperity and short lives to long lives. Similarly, fate cannot bind those who commit great wrongdoing.

Narrator: When a person's bad deeds are so great and powerful, they will cancel out the good fortune and prosperity predetermined in his original fate and his or her life can be transformed from good to bad.

Master Yun-Gu: For the past twenty years, you have lived your life according to Mr. Kong's predictions and did not do a thing to change it. Instead, you became bound by your own fate. If you are not considered an ordinary mortal, then who is?

Liao-Fan: Taken aback, I proceeded to ask Master Yun-Gu, "According to you then, is it true that one can change one's fate, that one can escape from it?" The Master answered...

Master Yun-Gu: We create our own fate. Good or bad fortune is also determined by ourselves. When I commit bad deeds, disasters are bound to strike. When I cultivate kindness, good fortune will naturally come my way. It says so in all the great ancient books of wisdom. In the Buddhist teachings, it is written that if one wishes for and seeks wealth, position, a son, a daughter or a long life, one can attain them. One only has to cultivate kind deeds in order to escape the control of fate. Since untruthful speech is one of the greatest offenses in Buddhist teachings, we can be assured that these are not lies. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas certainly have no reasons to deceive us.

Liao-Fan: I did not quite understand what he meant by "attaining all that one wished for" and so I asked him. Mencius once said...

Mencius: Whatever is sought for can be attained. The seeking is in oneself.

Liao Fan: This refers to inner qualities such as virtue, kindness and morality. These are all qualities we can work toward. However, when it comes to outside factors such as wealth, fame and prestige, how can we seek to attain them? Don't these have to be granted by others in order to be achieved? The Master replied...

Master Yun-Gu: Mencius was correct, but you misinterpreted his meaning. Hui-Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen School has taught that...

Sixth Patriarch Hui-Neng: All the fields of merit are within one's own heart. If one seeks from within, one can be in touch with all good fortunes and disasters. The outside is merely a reflection of the inside.

Master Yun-Gu: By seeking within ourselves, we cannot only attain the inner qualities of virtue, kindness and morality, but we can also attain wealth, fame and prestige.

Narrator: If wealth, fame and prestige are embodied in one's fate, then one will attain them even without having to pursue them. If they are not, then one cannot attain them even through plotting and scheming.

Master Yun-Gu: Therefore, if one cannot reflect within one's own heart but instead blindly seeks fame, fortune and long life from external sources, then this seeking will be in vain. Just as Mencius once said...

Mencius: In seeking, one needs to follow the right path. In attaining, one attains what destiny has entitled one to.

Narrator: Whatever is attained in the end is still part of one's own fate.

Master Yun-Gu: If one tries to seek these qualities from the outside and even goes to the extent of committing bad deeds for them, then one will not only lose one's inner qualities of virtue and kindness, but predetermined good fortune as well. Furthermore, wrongdoing committed in one's greedy mind to obtain more can reduce the good fortune of one's original fate. From this, we can see that no

benefit is derived from blind seeking. What were Mr. Kung's predictions regarding your entire life?

Liao-Fan: I told him in detail, from the placement positions in the examinations, to my appointment as an official and finally, the date of my death.

Master Yun-Gu: Do you feel you deserve imperial appointments or a son?

Liao-Fan: I reflected upon my previous deeds and attitudes in the past for a long time. Then I answered him saying, "No, I do not feel I deserve an imperial appointment or a son. Those who receive imperial appointments all have the appearance of good fortune and I do not. I do not work towards accumulating virtues to build up my good fortune, either. I am very impatient, intolerant and undisciplined, and speak without any restraint. I also have a strong sense of pride and arrogance. These are all signs of scant good fortune and non-virtue. How is it possible for me to receive an imperial appointment?"

Narrator: Next, we will see why Liao-Fan has no children. Liking cleanliness is a good thing, but it can become a problem if one becomes obsessive about cleanliness. There is an old saying, "Life springs from the dirt of the earth and water too clean often harbors no fish."

Liao-Fan: The first reason why I feel I do not deserve a son is that I am overly attached to cleanliness, resulting in

the lack of thoughtfulness for others. The second reason is that...**Narrator:** ...harmony is the cultivator of all life.

Liao-Fan: But I have a quick temper and easily become angry. The third reason is based on the principle that...

Narrator: ...loving-kindness is the basis of reproduction and harshness is the root of sterility.

Liao-Fan: I overly guard my own reputation and cannot sacrifice anything for the sake of others. The fourth reason is that I talk too much which wastes a lot of *chi*, or energy. The fifth reason is that I also delight in drinking alcohol and that depletes my spirit.

Narrator: To remain healthy, one does not sleep during the daytime and stay up through the night.

Liao-Fan: The sixth reason I do not have a son is my habit of staying up nights, not knowing how to conserve my energy. Aside from these, I have many, many, other faults, which are too numerous to mention. Master Yun-Gu then said...

Master Yun-Gu: According to you then, there are many things in life you do not deserve, not only fame and a son!

Narrator: Both good and bad fortune are formed from one's heart. Wise people know that everything they achieve or fail at in life are only consequences of their own actions and thoughts. Only an ignorant person assumes that all is the work of fate and destiny!

Master Yun-Gu: Those who have millions of dollars in this life must have cultivated the good fortune worthy of that amount in the past. Those who have thousands of dollars must also have good fortune, which is worthy of generating that sum. Those, who die of starvation, in fact were meant to die in that manner. We must understand that their own past thoughts and actions created the fate of these people; the karmic result today is simply the fruit of their deeds. Heaven does nothing more than punish bad beings with the suffering they deserve and reward kind ones with the good fortune they deserve.

Narrator: The following section is Master Yun-Gu's advice to Liao-Fan, using the views of ordinary people, persuading him to cultivate virtue.

Master Yun-Gu: Bearing children is similar to bearing fruit from seeds. If the seeds are planted well, the fruits will flourish. If the seeds are *not* planted well, then the fruits will become malnourished. For example, if a person has accumulated enough merits and virtues for a hundred generations, then he or she will have descendants to last a hundred generations.

One who accumulates enough merits and virtues to last ten generations will then have ten generations of descendants to live out that good fortune. The same goes for three generations or two generations. For those who have no descendants at all, it is because they have not accumulated enough good merits and virtues. They may have amassed offenses instead!

Now that you recognize your own shortcomings, you can work to change and reform the misdeeds, which cause you to not have a child or become an imperial official. You would do well to cultivate virtue and tolerance and to treat others with compassion and harmony. Also, care for your health and conserve your energy and spirit.

Live as though everything of the past dissolved yesterday and all of the future begins today. If you can accomplish this, then you are a person born anew. If even our physical body is governed by the law of fate, then how can a mind of virtue and discipline not evoke a response from heaven? As said in the Tai Ja Chapter in The Chinese Book of History...

Narrator: "One may run from the decrees of heaven, but one can never escape the retribution for one's own wrong deeds." In other words, one can alter the retribution due from past deeds, but if one continues to behave immorally, then there is no chance of avoiding disaster.

Master Yun-Gu: It is also said in the Book of Poems...

Narrator: "People should often reflect upon their own thoughts and actions to see if they accord with the ways of heaven. If one practices in this way, then good fortune will come without being sought. The choice to seek good fortune or to bring about adversity is all up to the individual."

Master Yun-Gu: Mr. Kong had predicted that you would not receive an imperial appointment or have a son. We can

think of these as the decrees of heaven, but even that can still be changed. You only need to reform your improper ways, practice kind deeds and work to accumulate merits and virtues. These are your own transactions to create good fortune, no one can take it away. How is it then possible that you will not get to enjoy it?

Narrator: The I Ching, Book of Change, was written to help kind people bring about good fortune and avoid adversity.

Master Yun-Gu: If everything is predestined with no room for change, how can we improve upon our good fortune and avoid adversity? The very first chapter of The I Ching, Book of Change also said...

Narrator: "Families who often perform kind deeds will have an excess of good fortune to pass on to the next generations."

Master Yun-Gu: Do you believe in this?

Liao-Fan: I understood and believed the Master and gratefully paid my respects to him. Then I began to regret all my past wrongdoings, whether large or small, in front of the Buddha image. I wrote down my wish to pass the imperial examinations and vowed to complete three thousand meritorious deeds to show my gratitude towards ancestors, earth and heaven. Upon hearing my vow, Master Yun-Gu showed me a chart and taught me how to keep a daily record of the kind and unkind acts I committed. He told me that bad deeds could neutralize the

merits I had accrued from good deeds. The Master also taught me how to recite the Jwun Ti Mantra; a way to train my mind for single-minded concentration. Only with a pure and unscattered mind could what I seek for come true. Master Yun-Gu then said...

Master Yun-Gu: It is said, "Those who are considered experts in the art of writing mantras but do not know the right way to do it will be laughed at by spirits and gods." The secret behind writing mantras is the absence of thought from start to finish. In the process of drawing, one must not give rise to a single wandering thought; even kind thoughts have to be let go of. Only under these circumstances can a mantra be successful. When one asks for or seeks something in terms of changing fate, it is important that one does it when the mind is still. In this way, wishes will be easily fulfilled.

Master Yun-Gu: Mencius stated in his "Principle of Forming Destiny" that...

Mencius: There is no difference between a long life and a short life.

Master Yun-Gu: At first glance, one would find this hard to understand. How can long life and short life be the same? In actuality, when we look within our hearts, we will find no duality, no difference. We will see everything with eyes of equality and live morally regardless of good or bad times. If one can practice accordingly, then one can master the fate of wealth and poverty. Therefore, when we

are able to create and form our own destiny, it does not matter whether we are presently rich or poor.

Narrator: Just as a wealthy person would do well to not become careless in thoughts and actions because he or she is rich, a poor person would not resort to committing improper deeds due to poverty. In either case, one needs to meet one's responsibilities and to be a virtuous person.

Master Yun-Gu: If one can practice morality regardless of conditions, then he or she will surely change a poor life into a prosperous one, and a prosperous life into an even longer lasting prosperity. One should also look upon long life and short life equally. A person who knows he or she is short-lived should not think, "I am going to die anyway, so there's no point in being virtuous, I should steal and kill for my benefit while I can."

Narrator: Instead, one who already knows he or she has a short life to live can be even more diligent in cultivating kindness, hoping to gain a longer life next time and then perhaps the merits from practicing kindness can even lengthen the present life.

Master Yun-Gu: One who is long-lived should not think, "I have all the time in the world, it does not matter if I do something bad once in while."

Narrator: A long life does not come easily. It is to be cherished and used to cultivate even more kindness and virtue. Otherwise, we may very well use up our long life all too soon.

Master Yun-Gu: One who understands this principle, will be able to change a short life into a long life through virtuous behavior.

The issue of life and death is the most critical issue of one's life. Therefore, long life and short life is also the most important issue to us. The same applies to wealth and poverty, good or bad reputation. The issue of long life and short life encompasses all of these.

Narrator: That is why Mencius did not need to mention the latter in his principle of creating destiny, since he had already spoken about long and short life.

Liao-Fan: Master Yun-Gu then told me about Mencius' teaching on cultivating the self.

Master Yun-Gu: One who wishes to cultivate needs to do so daily and to be mindful of his or her conduct every moment, ensuring that no transgressions are made. As for changing one's destiny, *that* depends on the accumulation of merits, seeking for a response from the heavens. When cultivating, one needs to be aware of one's own faults and resolve to correct them just as in curing a sickness.

Perseverance is required and attainment comes when one's practice matures and ripens. In that case, one's destiny will most definitely change for the better. We should work toward severing all bad habits and thoughts. It would be quite an accomplishment for the true benefits of these teachings to be felt once one reaches the state of 'no thought.'

The actions of worldly people usually follow their thoughts. Whatever has to be ‘thought’ is not considered natural. I know that you are still unable to accomplish the state of ‘no thought’, but if you practice reciting the Jwun Ti Mantra continuously, it will help you to overcome scattered thoughts. When you recite, you must not think of reciting, but recite consciously and diligently without any attachment. When the reciting becomes second nature, it will be effective.

Narrator: The essence of this practice can only be understood after one practices it.

Liao-Fan: My name used to be Shuei-Hai, which meant ‘broad learning’, but after receiving these teachings from Master Yun-Gu, I changed it to Liao-Fan, which means ‘transcending the ordinary.’ It signified my understanding of the fact that we create our destiny and that I did not wish to be like worldly people, who allowed destiny to control them.

From then on, I began to be constantly aware of my thoughts and actions. I was very cautious and careful in whatever I thought or did. Soon I felt quite different from before. In the past, I used to be careless and lived my days in distraction and had no self-discipline at all.

Now, I find myself being naturally respectful, careful and conservative in my thoughts, speech and actions. I maintain this attitude even when I am alone, for I know that there are spirits and gods everywhere who can see my

every action and thought. Even when I encounter people, who dislike or slander me, I can take their insults with a patient and peaceful mind and not feel compelled to quarrel with them.

The year after I met Master Yun-Gu, I took the preliminary imperial exam in which Mr. Kong had predicted I would come in third place. Amazingly, I came in first! Mr. Kong's predictions were beginning to lose their accuracy. He had not predicted I would pass the imperial exam at all, but that autumn, I did! None of these were part of my original destiny. Master Yun-Gu had said that...

Master Yun-Gu: Destiny can be changed.

Liao-Fan: And now I believe it more than ever! Although I had corrected many of my faults, I found that I could not wholeheartedly do the things I ought to do. Even if I did do them, it was forced and unnatural. I reflected within and found that I still had many shortcomings.

Narrator: Such as seeing an opportunity to practice kindness and not being eager enough to do it, or harboring doubts when helping others in need.

Liao-Fan: Sometimes I forced myself to act kindly, but my speech was still untamed and offensive. I found I could contain myself when sober, but after a few drinks, I would lose self-discipline and act without restraint. Although I often practiced kind deeds and accumulated merits, my faults and offenses were so numerous, they seemed to outnumber my good deeds. A lot of my time was spent

vainly and without value. It took me more than ten years to complete the three thousand meritorious deeds I had vowed to do.

I was not able to dedicate the merits from these three thousand kind deeds at a temple until I returned to my hometown in the south a few years later. Then I made my second wish and that was for a son. I vowed to complete another three thousand good deeds. A few years later, your mother gave birth to you and named you Tian-Chi.

Every time I performed a kind deed, I would record it in a book. Your mother, who could not read or write, would use a goose feather dipped in ink and make a red circle on the calendar for every kind deed she did. Sometimes she gave food to the poor or bought living creatures from the marketplace to free in the wild. She recorded all of these with her circles on the calendar. At times, she could accumulate more than ten red circles in one day!

Everyday we practiced like this and in four years, the three thousand deeds were completed. Again, I made the dedications, this time in our home. On September thirteenth of that same year, I made my third wish and that was to pass the next level of the imperial examination, the *Jinshr* level. I also vowed to complete ten thousand meritorious deeds. After three years, I attained my wish and passed the *Jinshr* level. I was also made the mayor of Baodi province. While in that office, I prepared a small book to record my merits and faults, and called it The Book of Disciplining the Mind.

Narrator: The book was called Disciplining the Mind in hopes of helping him avoid selfish and improper thoughts.

Liao-Fan: From that day, I recorded all my good and bad deeds in that book and kept it on my desk. Every evening, I would burn incense and make a report of my deeds to the heavens at the little altar in the garden. Once, your mother was concerned when she saw that I had not accumulated much merit and asked...

Tian-Chi's Mother: In the past, I was able to help you in your accumulation of kind deeds and we were able to complete the three thousand meritorious deeds. Now, you have made a vow to complete ten thousand kind deeds and there are fewer opportunities to practice them here at the government residence. How long will it be before your vow can be fulfilled?

Liao-Fan: That night, after your mother spoke these words, I dreamed of a heavenly being and told him of my difficulty in completing the ten thousand kind deeds. The heavenly being said to me...

Heavenly being: When you became mayor, you reduced the taxes on the rice fields; that was a great kind deed and that deed itself was worth ten thousand merits. Your vow is already fulfilled!

Liao-Fan: As it turned out, the farmers in Baodi province had to pay a very high tax and when I came to office, I reduced the taxes on the rice fields by nearly half. But still, I felt strange...

Narrator: ...how did the heavenly being know about the tax reduction? Liao-Fan still held doubts and wondered how a single deed could be worth ten thousand merits.

Liao-Fan: Coincidentally, the Zen Master Huan-Yu was traveling from the Five-Plateau Mountains and stopped in Baodi. I invited him to the government residence, told him of my dream and asked whether it was believable. Master Huan-Yu said...

Master Huan-Yu: When doing kind deeds, one must be true and sincere and not seek any rewards or act with falsity. If one does a kind deed with such a true and sincere heart, then one deed can indeed be worth the merits from ten thousand kind deeds. Besides, your act of reducing the taxes in this province benefits more than ten thousand people; you have relieved the suffering of heavy taxes on all these farmers. The good fortune you will gain from this act will surely be great!

Liao-Fan: Upon hearing his words, I was overwhelmed with gratitude and immediately gave all my savings for him to take back to the Five-Plateau Mountains. I asked the Master to use the money for a food offering for ten thousand monks and to dedicate the merits for me.

Mr. Kong had predicted that I would die at the age of fifty-three. However, I survived that year with no illnesses although I did not ask the heavens for a longer life. Now I am sixty-nine and I have lived sixteen more years than

what was destined! The Chinese Book of History had said...

Narrator: "The way of the Heavens is not determined and neither is one's destiny. Destiny is not set, but is only created and determined by oneself."

Liao-Fan: These are all true, and I have come to understand that both good fortune and adversity are results of one's own doings. These are truly the words of sages and saints! If one were to say that good fortune and adversity are all determined by the heavens, then I would consider that person to be ordinary.

Tian-Chi, my son, I wonder how your life will be? In any case of destiny we should always prepare for the worst; therefore, even in times of prosperity, act as if you were not and when things are going your way, be mindful of adversity. When you are wealthy, be mindful of poverty and when loved and respected by all, remain careful and conservative. When the family is greatly respected and revered, carry yourself humbly. When your learning is broad and deep, always think of it as slight and keep it humbly within.

Narrator: If one can cultivate the mind, then virtue and morality will grow and good fortune will increase on its own.

Liao-Fan: When 'mindful of the past', we can spread the virtues of our ancestors. When 'mindful of the present',

we can conceal the faults of our own parents. This is what Mencius called...

Mencius: Parents caring for children and children caring for parents.

Liao Fan: When 'mindful of the nation', we can think of how we can repay its kindness to us and when 'mindful of the family', we can think of how to bring about good fortune. When 'mindful of the outside', think of how to help those in need around us, and when 'mindful of within', think of how to prevent wrong thoughts and improper actions from arising.

Narrator: These six contemplations are all positive ways to cultivate good character. If one can practice accordingly, one will surely become a truly honorable person.

Liao-Fan: One needs to be able to detect one's faults everyday in order to correct them everyday. If one is unable to detect any faults in oneself, then improvement of character is out of the question. There are many intelligent people in the world who refuse to cultivate morality and virtue, and cannot put forth diligent effort in their work. Their failures later in life are owed to a single word - laziness.

Tian-Chi, the teachings of Master Yun-Gu are truly the most worthy, profound, real and proper teachings, and I hope you will study them closely and practice them with

all your effort. You must use your time wisely and not let it slip by in vain.

The Second Lesson: Ways to Reform

Narrator: How can we be free from faults when we were not born as sages or saints? Confucius once said...

Confucius: One with faults should not fear to correct them.

Narrator: After Liao-Fan spoke of the ways to create destiny, he proceeded to tell his son about the three ways to reform. First, one must feel shame; second, one must know fear; and third, one must have determination and courage. If we were mindful of correcting even the tiniest mistake, then large wrongdoings would naturally be avoided.

The Spring-Autumn Period mentioned throughout this book refers to a period in China's history over two thousand years ago when the country was undergoing great change and turmoil.

Liao-Fan: During the Spring-Autumn Period, China was divided into several small nations. Many prestigious advisors and counselors of these nations were able to accurately predict whether a person's future would be good or bad, disastrous or fortunate based on their

observation of that person's speech and behavior. Many of these are recorded in history books.

Usually, there are signs that signal impending danger or coming good fortune. These signs are a reflection of one's heart. Though it is the heart from which thoughts arise, the body can fully portray a person's character.

Narrator: For instance, if a person is kind-hearted, then his or her every gesture will indicate steadiness and solidity. If a person was mean, then his or her body would naturally portray a petty and small character.

Liao-Fan: Often a person is more fortunate when tending toward kindness and invites trouble when tending toward meanness. Worldly people often do not see what is actually going on. It is as if their vision was blurred. Since they cannot see reality, they claim that good fortune and disasters are unpredictable.

When a person is absolutely honest and truthful, one's heart is in agreement with the heart of heaven. Therefore, when one can use this sincere attitude in interacting with people and everyday matters, good fortune will naturally follow. This means that in observing someone, we only need to pay attention to that person's behavior. If this behavior portrays kindness, then you will know for sure in advance that good fortune is not far behind.

Narrator: On the contrary, when we see unkind behavior from a person, we will know that troubles await him or her. If one really wants to have good fortune and stay

away from adversity, it is necessary to first reform one's faults before practicing kind deeds.

Liao-Fan: There are three ways to reform one's faults. First, one 'feels shame'. Think of all the ancient sages and saints whose names and teachings have lasted through hundreds of generations. They were people just like us, but why is my name tarnished and my reputation ruined in just one lifetime? I find that it is because I over-indulge myself in material pleasures and have been seriously influenced by my bad surroundings. I then secretly do many things I am not supposed to do, and think others will not know about it. Sometimes I disregard the nation's laws and am not ashamed of it.

Without realizing it, I stoop lower each day until I am no different from an animal. There is nothing else in the world, which calls for more shame and remorse than behavior such as this. Mencius once said...

Mencius: Shame is the greatest and most important word in a person's lifetime. Why? Because one who knows shame, will put forth his or her best efforts into reforming faults and will eventually attain sagehood or become a saint. One who cannot comprehend the word 'shame' will be unrestrained and immoral. This person will then be just like an animal.

Liao-Fan: These are really key words to reforming our faults. The second way to reform is to 'know fear'. What

are we to fear? Earth, spirits, heavens and gods all hover over our heads in observation.

Narrator: They are different from humans in that they can see everything without obstruction. Therefore, it is not easy to deceive them.

Liao-Fan: Even when my wrongdoings are done in a place where nobody is around to witness them, the earth, spirits, heavens and gods are just like a mirror, clearly reflecting all my faults. If my offense is serious, then all kinds of disasters will befall me; if the fault is minor, it will still deduct from my current good fortune. How can I not feel fear? Every moment, even when I am in an empty room, the spirits and gods watch over me very carefully and record everything. We can try covering up our wrongdoings from others...

Narrator: ...but the spirits and gods can see through to our hearts and therefore they know our every action.

Liao Fan: Ultimately, we cannot deceive ourselves. We would feel embarrassed and dishonored if others happened to see our misdeeds. Therefore, how can we not be constantly cautious of our every action and be fearful of the consequences they might evoke? But there is more to it! As long as a person still has one breath left, then he or she has the chance to regret even the most serious mistakes and offenses.

Narrator: Once, a person who behaved badly during his entire lifetime felt remorse just when he was about to die.

He realized his past mistakes and regretted all the bad things he had done. His heart came to a very kind thought and immediately afterwards, he passed away peacefully.

Liao-Fan: This is to say, if a person can have an overwhelming and courageous kind thought at the most important moment, then it can cleanse away hundreds of years of accumulated misdeeds. This is just like only one lamp being necessary to bring light into a valley that has been dark for a thousand years. It does not matter how long one has been committing misdeeds or if the offenses were newly made. He or she is a surpassing person as long as they are able to change!

Narrator: Though we make mistakes, it is good to correct them. But do not think it is all right to do bad things now just because we can always regret and reform later. This is definitely not allowed. If one commits a wrongdoing purposely, then the offense is even greater than before.

Liao-Fan: Besides, we are living in a tumultuous and constantly changing world. Our body, made of flesh and blood, is extremely perishable. If our next breath does not come, then this body will no longer be part of us. By then, even if we did want to reform, we would no longer have the chance to do so.

Narrator: Also, when one dies, one cannot take along any worldly possessions. Only karma stays with one's spirit.

Liao-Fan: Therefore, when one commits a wrongdoing, one's retribution in the physical world is a bad reputation

and name, which will last for hundreds and thousands of years. Even filial children and loving grandchildren cannot cleanse one's name. Then in one's afterlife, one might end up in hell suffering immeasurable pain. Even the sages, saints, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas cannot help or save one from the consequences. So how can one not be fearful?

The third way to reform is that one must have 'determination and courage'. **Narrator:** A person who hesitates to reform his or her faults is one who really does not want to change, but is content with what he or she can get away with.

Liao Fan: Our willpower may not be strong enough, making us afraid to change our wrongdoings. For a reform to take place, we must use all our efforts and resolve to change immediately. We should not doubt or wait to reform our faults, nor postpone our resolve to change until tomorrow or the day after.

A minor fault is like a thorn sticking into our flesh and should be quickly removed. A big fault is like a finger bitten by a poisonous snake. We must cut off that finger without hesitation to prevent the poison from spreading and taking our life.

If we can follow the three ways of shame, fear and determination to reform, then our personality will surely be transformed. Just as the sun's rays melt a thin layer of ice in springtime, our faults will also disappear when dealt with through these three ways.

There are also three methods of practice to help us reform. First is changing through action, second is changing through reasoning and third is changing from the heart.

Narrator: Since the methods vary, so do the results of change. First, let us talk about ‘changing through action’.

Liao-Fan: For example, if I killed living beings in the past, I now vow not to kill again starting today. If I was angry and yelled at others in the past, I vow not to get angry starting today. This is how a person changes through action and refrains from repeating a wrongdoing by vowing not to do it again. However, it is a hundred times harder if we force ourselves not to do something than if we just stopped doing it naturally. If we do not uproot our faults, but merely suppress them, the faults will eventually resurface even if we have temporarily stopped committing them. Therefore, the method of changing through action cannot help us get rid of our faults permanently.

Second, let me explain ‘changing through reasoning’. We can try to reform by refraining from wrongdoings by understanding the reason and principle behind why we should not do it. In the instance of killing, we can reform through contemplating that...

Narrator: ...loving all living things is a virtue of heaven. All living beings love life and are afraid to die. How can I be at peace with myself by taking another’s life to nurture my own? At times, animals were even cooked alive, such as fish or crabs. They may not have been completely

slaughtered before going into the cooking pot. Such pain and suffering reach down into the bones, how can we be so cruel to these animals?

When we eat, we use all kinds of expensive and tasty things to nourish our bodies, enough to fill the whole dinner table! But once the meal is done, even the best delicacies will become body waste and be excreted. The result of our killing accomplishes nothing. Consuming vegetarian foods can nourish us just as well. Why let our stomach become a graveyard and reduce our good fortune through the violation of killing?

Liao-Fan: Think again of all the living beings with flesh and blood. Like us, they have a consciousness. We can cultivate virtue and allow these living beings to feel safe around us. How can we continue to harm them and make them hate us? If we think about it, we will naturally feel sorrow for these animals and be unable to swallow their flesh.

Another example of changing through reasoning is the person who often gets angry. They need to stop and think that everyone has his or her individual strengths and weaknesses. According to my reasoning, if I touched on someone else's weakness, I should feel sorry for that weakness and forgive any shortcomings. If someone offends me for no reason at all, then it is that person's problem and has nothing to do with me. There is no reason for me to get angry. I can also think that...

Narrator: ...there is not a right-minded person who thinks he or she is always right, for anyone who thinks so must be a fool. There is not a learned person who blames another for being knowledgeable, because a truly learned person would be humble, only criticizing himself or herself and treating others with tolerance. Therefore, one who complains about others is not a genuine learned person.

Liao-Fan: Therefore, when things do not go the way we wish, it is because we have not cultivated our virtues and morals, and have not accumulated enough merits to move others! We should always reflect upon ourselves first and see whether we have mistreated others.

Narrator: If we practice in this way and diligently cultivate this virtue, then adversity and slander can actually become a training ground to refine our character and to fulfill our goals.

Liao-Fan: Therefore, we should be very glad to accept someone else's criticism and teachings. What is there to be angry and complain about?

Additionally, to remain unmoved by slander is like letting a torch burn itself out in space. If we hear others slandering us and try to defend ourselves, it would be like the spring silkworm spinning its own cocoon. There was an old saying...

Narrator: "Those who tie themselves in a cocoon are looking for suffering."

Liao-Fan: Therefore, no benefit but rather harm is derived from getting angry. There are other faults and offenses we can change along the same lines. If we can understand the reasoning behind the need for reform, we will not make the same mistakes twice.

Lastly, what is meant by ‘changing from the heart’? Though a person’s faults can amount to thousands of different types, they all stem from thoughts of the mind/heart. If my mind/heart is still of thoughts, then actions will not arise and faults can be avoided. If my heart is rooted in vices such as desire, fame, profit or anger, I do not have to find ways to get rid of each fault. All we need is a sincere, kind heart and the willingness to practice kind deeds. As long as my mind/heart is virtuous and kind, then naturally it will not generate any improper thoughts.

All mistakes stem from the heart; therefore, we change from the heart. It is like getting rid of a poisonous tree. If we want to put an end to it, we uproot it altogether so it cannot grow again. Why exert ourselves to no avail by pulling out its leaves one by one and cutting it twig by twig? The best way to reform our faults is through cultivating our hearts. If we are willing to cultivate our hearts, then it is possible to purify our faults right away.

Narrator: This is because wrongdoings originate from the heart.

Liao-Fan: Purifying the heart can erase all improper and bad thoughts before they are carried out in action. If my heart is pure, I can recognize and stop an improper thought as soon as it arises. The immoral idea will disappear the moment I am conscious of it.

If I am unable to succeed at reforming a fault through changing the heart, then I will try at the level of understanding, knowing the reasons why I need to make the change. If I cannot succeed with this, then I will try to reform by changing through action and force the thought to dissipate.

The best way is by cultivating the heart and understanding the reason behind the need to change. The alternative way is forcing ourselves not to commit the wrongdoing again. Sometimes all three methods have to be used to succeed at reforming a fault.

Narrator: It is foolish to dismiss the best way, which is to reform from the heart and attach to the inferior way of reforming through action.

Liao-Fan: But even when one vows to change, assistance is needed to truly reform. We will need constant reminders from true friends who are witnesses to our actions in everyday life. As for our good and bad thoughts, we can ask the spirits and gods to be our witness.

I practice this by writing down all my faults and reporting them to the earth, spirits, heavens and gods. We also need to regret sincerely and wholeheartedly from morning to

night without laxity. If we can sincerely regret from one to two weeks, then one to three months, continuing this way, then we will definitely attain results and benefits.

Narrator: What are the benefits of contrition? We may feel very much at ease and our hearts may feel light and generous. A person of low intelligence may suddenly become wise. Another might maintain a clear and relaxed mind even in a disturbing and confusing environment. We would also feel a great knowledge of everything.

We would be able to drive out all hatred upon seeing an enemy and maintain a happy attitude. We may dream of spitting out black things; a sign of expelling improper thoughts and negative energy, leaving the heart much cleaner and purer. We may also dream of the ancient sages or saints who have come to promote and help us or we may dream of flying in space without a care in the world. We may also dream of all kinds of colorful flags and ornately decorated canopies. These unusual phenomena are all indications of a successful reform and dissolving of past offenses.

Liao-Fan: However, one must not consider seeing these phenomena as a sign of perfection. Instead, one must resolve to further improve the self and put forth greater effort to reform.

During the Spring-Autumn period of China's history, there was a high senior government official in Wei, named Bwo-Yu Chu. When he was twenty, he was already mindful of

his past faults. He studied his mistakes and tried to correct them thoroughly. At the age of twenty-one, he felt he still had not completely corrected all his faults. When he was twenty-two, he felt as if twenty-one was spent dreamily, without practical improvement.

Thus, year after year, he continued to correct his faults. When he reached fifty, Bwo-Yu still felt that the past forty-nine years were full of wrongdoings.

Narrator: This was how particular our ancestors were regarding the correction of faults!

Liao-Fan: We are all just ordinary people and our mistakes are as numerous as the spines on a porcupine. Oftentimes when we look back, we do not even see our own faults. This is because we are careless and do not know how to reflect on our own actions. It is as if a cataract is growing in our eye. We become so blind that we cannot even see that we are making mistakes everyday! There are also indications when people have accumulated too many offenses and wrongdoings.

Narrator: One's heart may feel confused and oppressed, lacking energy and spirit. One becomes extremely forgetful, full of worries and feels embarrassed and depressed upon meeting a virtuous person. One becomes displeased at hearing proper reasoning and when showing kindness to others, is in turn treated with hostility. One will constantly have nightmares where everything is upside-down and will talk incoherently and behave

abnormally. These are the symptoms of those who have accumulated too many offenses and transgressions!

Liao-Fan: If we have any of the above symptoms, we can immediately gather our willpower and reform all faults. It is necessary to form a new life and not delay!

The Third Lesson: The Way to Cultivate Kindness

Narrator: The previous chapter spoke about the many ways to correct our faults in this present life, naturally assuring that a good life will not become a bad one. However, we are still unable to transform a bad life into a good one. Though we may be good and virtuous in this life, we do not know what offenses we have committed in past lives. The retribution for past misdeeds still has to be undergone. Therefore, in order to change a bad life into a good life, we not only have to reform our faults, but also have to practice all forms of kindness and build upon our virtues.

Only in this way can we rid ourselves of the karma created in the past. Once the number of our kind deeds accumulates, our bad life will naturally turn into a good life; thus, the practice of changing destiny can be proven!

Liao-Fan: The I Ching, Book of Change states...

Narrator: "Families who perform kind deeds will accumulate good fortune, which can outlast many generations."

Liao-Fan: Let me give an example. Once there was a family by the name of Yen. Before they agreed to give their daughter in marriage to the man whom later became Confucius' father, they looked into the past deeds of the family. After finding the family to be one that practiced kindness and accumulated virtues, the Yen family felt assured that their daughter would be marrying into a family that would be prosperous with outstanding descendants. Sure enough, their daughter later gave birth to Confucius.

Liao-Fan: Confucius had once praised Shwun, an emperor of early China, on his filial piety, saying...

Confucius: Due to his great filial piety, Shwun and his ancestors will be known and respected by others. His offspring will be prominent for many, many generations.

Liao-Fan: These sayings were later proven true by history. Now I will show in some true stories that merits can be attained through performing kind deeds.

In Fukien province, there was a prominent man named Rong Yang who held a position in the imperial court as the Emperor's teacher. His ancestors were boat people who made a living by helping people cross the river. Once, there was a storm, which lasted so long that fierce flooding

washed away all the people's houses. People, animals and goods were carried down river by the current.

Other boaters took advantage of the situation and strove to collect the floating goods. Only Rong Yang's grandfather and great grandfather took interest in rescuing the drowning people. They did not take any of the goods that floated by. The other boaters all laughed and thought them to be very stupid. Later, when Rong Yang's father was born, the Yang family gradually became wealthy. One day a saint disguised as a Taoist monk came to the Yang family.

Taoist Monk: Your ancestors have accumulated much merit; your offspring should enjoy wealth and prominence. There is a special place where you can build your ancestral tomb.

Liao-Fan: So they followed the Taoist's suggestion and shortly after, Rong Yang was born. Rong Yang passed the imperial examination when he was only twenty years old and later received imperial appointments.

Narrator: The emperor even bestowed his grandfather and great grandfather with the same imperial honors. His descendants are still very prominent today.

Liao-Fan: Zi-Cheng Yang from the province of Ninpo, Chehkiang province is another example. Zi-Cheng worked as a member of the staff of the provincial courthouse. He was a kind, humane and law-abiding man. Once, the provincial magistrate punished a criminal by beating him

until his blood spilled out onto the ground. The magistrate's anger did not subside and as he was about to continue, Zi-Cheng knelt and pleaded with him to stop beating the prisoner. The magistrate said...

Magistrate: It is all right for you to plead, but how can I not be angry when this person has broken the law!

Zi-Cheng: When even those in government positions of prestige and power are corrupted and do not follow the Proper Path, how can one expect ordinary people to abide by regulations and laws? In addition, extreme beating can force an innocent suspect to plead guilty. Thus in a case like this we should be more understanding.

Liao-Fan: The magistrate was touched by Zi-Cheng's speech and ceased the beating. Although Zi-Cheng came from a very poor family, he never took any bribes. If the prisoners were short of food, he would always take food from his own home even if it meant going hungry himself. This practice of compassion never ceased and eventually Zi-Cheng had two sons.

Narrator: The elder's name was Shou-Chen and the younger was named Shou-Zi. Both sons became very prominent and held important government positions. Even the descendants of the Yang family remained prominent for a long time as well.

Liao-Fan: Here is another true story that happened during the Ming Dynasty. Once, an organization of bandits appeared in Fukien Province. The Emperor appointed

General Hsieh to lead the imperial army to pacify them. General Hsieh wanted to make sure that innocents were not accidentally killed in the hunt for bandits.

Therefore, he managed to attain a list of those who belonged to the organization and commanded that a white flag be given secretly to those who did not belong with the bandits. They were told to place the flag on their door when the imperial army came to town and the soldiers were ordered not to harm the innocent. With this one thought of kindness, General Hsieh saved tens of thousands of people from being killed.

Narrator: Later, his son Chian Hsieh achieved first place in the imperial exams and later became an advisor to the emperor. His grandson Pei Hsieh also achieved high placement in the exams.

Liao-Fan: Another example is the Lin family from Fukien. Among their ancestors was an old lady who was very generous. Everyday she made rice balls to give to the poor and always gave as many as they asked for.

There was a Taoist monk who came everyday for three years and each time would ask for six or seven rice balls. The old lady always granted his request and never expressed any displeasure. The Taoist monk, who was actually a heavenly being who had come to test the depth of her kind heart, realized the deep sincerity of this woman's kindness and said...

Taoist Monk: I have eaten your rice balls for three years with nothing to show my gratitude in return. Perhaps I can help you in this way; on the land behind your house, there is a good place where you can build the ancestral grave. If you are placed there in the future, the number of your descendants who will have imperial appointments will be equivalent to the number of seeds in a pound of sesame seeds.

Liao-Fan: When the old lady passed away, the Lin family followed the heavenly being's suggestion and buried her at the designated place. The first generation after that, nine men passed the imperial exams and it continued that way for every succeeding generation.

Another example comes from the father of an imperial historian whose name was Chi Feng. One winter many years ago, Chi Feng's father was on his way to school when he encountered a person frozen in the snow. Finding the man still breathing, he quickly took off his coat to wrap around the frozen man. He carried him back home and revived him. That night he dreamed of a heavenly being who told him...

Heavenly being: You helped the dying man out of utter sincerity, this is a great virtue. I will bring the famous General Han-Chi of the Sung Dynasty to be reborn as your son.

Liao-Fan: Later the child was born and his nickname was Chi. Another example is of Ta-Jo Ying, the imperial

secretary who lived in Taichou. When he was young, he used to study in remote mountain areas. At night, he often heard the sounds of ghosts and spirits but he never feared them. One day he heard a ghost say happily to another ghost...

First ghost: Ha Ha! There is a village woman whose husband left home a long time ago and has not returned. Her in-laws think that their son is dead and are forcing her to remarry. Tomorrow night she is going to commit suicide here and will replace me so I can be reborn. Ha Ha!

Narrator: The souls of those who commit suicide have to wait for another to die at the same place they did in order to leave the ghost realm and attain rebirth at a higher level.

Liao-Fan: Mr. Ying heard this and immediately set out to sell his parcel of land. He attained four *lians* of silver, made up a letter from the daughter-in-law's husband and sent it to her home along with the silver. The father-in-law noticed that the letter was not in his son's handwriting, but examined the silver and said...

Father-in-law: The letter may be a fake, but the silver's not. Who would send us this much money? Perhaps our son is truly alive and well, and we should not force our daughter-in-law to remarry.

Liao-Fan: Therefore the daughter-in-law did not commit suicide and her husband returned home after all. Mr. Ying heard the ghosts converse again...

First ghost: Hah! Originally I was able to leave this place for rebirth, but Mr. Ying messed up my chance!

Second ghost: Why don't you inflict some harm on him?

First ghost: No, I cannot. The gods have recognized his goodness and virtue and he is going to receive a prominent position in the future. How can I harm him?

Liao-Fan: Mr. Ying heard this and became even more diligent in practicing kindness and accumulating merits. Whenever there was a famine, he would use his own money to buy food for the poor and needy and was always eager to help those in emergencies. When things did not go his way, he always reflected within himself rather than complain of the outside conditions. Even today, his descendants are still very prominent.

There was another person, Feng-Chu Hsu, who lived in Changso, Chiangsu province, whose father was very wealthy. Whenever there was a famine, his father would donate his own grain and all the rent on the rice fields to the poor. One night he heard ghosts singing outside his home...

Ghosts: No kidding! No kidding! A person in the Hsu family is going to pass the imperial exam!

Liao-Fan: This went on for several days and sure enough, that year his son Feng-Chu passed the imperial exam. From then on, he was even more diligent in doing good deeds and accumulating merits. He often fixed bridges and

took care of travelers and monks. One day he heard the ghosts sing again...

Ghosts: ...No kidding! No kidding! A person in the Hsu family is going to pass an even higher level on the imperial exam!

Narrator: And sure enough, Feng-Chu passed the higher exam and became the governor of two provinces!

Liao-Fan: Another example is Kung-Shi Tu who lived in Chiashing, Chehkiang Province. Mr. Tu used to work in the courthouse and would spend nights in the prison cells, talking with the inmates. Whenever he found anyone innocent, he would write a classified report to the judge, informing him of these cases. The judge would then question the prisoners accordingly and clear the case.

Narrator: Through Mr. Tu's effort, ten innocent people were released and all of them were extremely grateful to the judge praising his wise judgement. Soon after, Mr. Tu, who had quietly let the judge take the praise, also made a report to the Imperial Judge saying...

Mr. Tu: ...if even in the Imperial City there are so many innocent imprisoned, there must be many more throughout the nation. I recommend that the Imperial Judge send investigators to check the prisons for innocent people every five years. The sentences can be reduced or canceled in order to prevent the innocent from remaining in prison.

Liao-Fan: The Imperial Judge took his request to the Emperor, who agreed to Mr. Tu's suggestion. Mr. Tu was

chosen as one of the special agents in charge of reducing sentences for those who may be innocent. One night he dreamed of a heavenly being who came to him and said...

Heavenly being: You were not supposed to deserve a son in this life, but this act of reducing prison sentences for innocent people is in line with the wishes of the heavens. You will be bestowed with three sons and they will all attain high positions.

Liao-Fan: After that, his wife gave birth to three sons who all became prominent men in society.

Another example of attaining good outcomes from practicing kindness is Ping Bao who lived in Chiashing. Ping was the youngest of the seven sons of the magistrate of Chichou, Anhui Province. He was sought into marriage by the Yuan family at Pinghu Province and was a good friend of my father. Ping Bao was very knowledgeable and talented, but he was never able to pass the exams.

Narrator: He put his time into studying the teachings of Buddhism and Taoism instead.

Liao Fan: Once, while traveling to Lake Liu, he came to a village and saw a temple in desperate need of repairs. He saw that the statue of Guan Yin Bodhisattva stood wet from the rain, which leaked through the roof. Ping took out all his money and gave it to the abbot of the temple, asking him to please use it to restore the temple. The abbot replied...

Abbot: It will be a very big project, I am afraid this amount is not enough to complete your wish.

Liao-Fan: Ping Bao then took out all his luxurious belongings and handed them to the abbot. His servant tried to persuade him into keeping his best outfit, but he refused, saying...

Ping Bao: It does not matter to me. As long as the statue of Guan Yin Bodhisattva remains undamaged, I do not care if I have to go without clothes.

Liao-Fan: The abbot, with tears in his eyes, exclaimed:

Abbot: To give up money and clothing is not a difficult deed to accomplish, but your deep sincerity is truly rare and precious to encounter!

Liao-Fan: After the temple was repaired, Ping Bao led his father over to visit and spent the night there as well. That night, Ping dreamed of the Dharma Protector of the temple, Chie-Lan, coming to thank him saying...

Chie-Lan: Since you have accumulated these merits and virtues, your children and descendants will enjoy having imperial appointments for a long time.

Liao-Fan: Later, his son and grandson both passed high exams and were appointed as imperial officials.

Another example is a person named Li-Zhi from Jiashan province. His father used to be a clerk in the provincial courthouse. Once, Li's father learned of an innocent man who was given the death penalty. He attempted to plead

this case with his superior. When the prisoner heard about this, he told his wife...

Prisoner: I am so indebted to this man who has spoken on my behalf but I have no way of showing my gratitude. Will you invite him over to our house and offer yourself in marriage? Perhaps this will please him and increase my chances to live.

Liao-Fan: The wife cried as she listened to his request, for she really did not want to do it. However, it was the only way she could help her husband in this time of need. Therefore, the next day when the clerk came to visit, she offered him wine and told him of her husband's wishes. The clerk refused the offer of marriage, but continued with great effort to clear the case. When at last the prisoner was released, he and his wife both went to the clerk's house to thank him. The man said...

Prisoner: One with such virtue as yours is truly rare to encounter these days, how can I show my gratitude? You do not have a son, please allow me to offer my daughter in marriage to you, this is the only way I can repay you. Please accept.

Liao-Fan: So the clerk accepted, and soon afterwards, she bore him his son, Li-Zhi. Li passed the higher level imperial exam when he was just twenty years old.

Narrator: Li's son Gao, grandson Lu and great grandson Da-Lwun all passed high examinations and received imperial appointments.

Liao-Fan: The ten examples above all tell of the different deeds cultivated by different people. Although their actions differ, their intent was the same: to do good. If we were to examine goodness closely, we would find that there are many different kinds.

Narrator: There is real goodness and false goodness, honest goodness and crooked goodness, hidden and visible, seeming and unseeming, proper and improper, full and half, big and small, and finally, difficult and easy.

Liao-Fan: These different types of goodness each have their own reason, which are to be carefully learned and understood. If we practice kind deeds but do not learn the way to differentiate between right and wrong, we may end up doing harm instead of good. Now I will explain the different types of goodness one by one.

What is 'real goodness and false goodness'? In the Yuan Dynasty, a group of scholars went to pay homage to Master Jung Feng on Tianmu Mountain. They asked...

First scholar: Buddhist teachings often speak of the karmic reward for good and bad, saying "It is like the shadow, following the body wherever it goes."

Narrator: This is saying that doing good will always have its rewards and doing bad will always have its punishments.

First scholar: Then why is it, that there are people who practice kind deeds, but their family and descendants are not prosperous and successful? On the other hand, there

are bad and wicked people who do improper things, but their family and descendants do quite well. Where has the Law of Cause and Effect gone? Is there no standard in the Buddha's teachings?

Liao-Fan: Master Jung Feng answered him, saying...

Master Jung-Fung: Ordinary people are blinded by worldly views, they have not cleansed their minds of impurities and cannot see with true perception. Therefore, they look upon true goodness as wrongdoings and mistake true wrongdoings as goodness. This is very common nowadays! Furthermore, these people do not blame themselves for bad perception on their part, but instead blame the heavens for their misfortunes!

Second scholar: Good is good and bad is bad. How can they be mistaken for each other?

Liao-Fan: Hearing this, Master Jung Feng asked each of them to express their thoughts on what was good and what was bad.

Third scholar: To yell at and beat others is bad, to respect and treat others in a mannerly way is good.

Master Jung-Fung: ...not necessarily.

Fourth scholar: Being greedy for wealth and taking another's money is bad, not being greedy and abiding by proper ways is good.

Master Jung-Fung: ...not necessarily.

Liao-Fan: The remaining scholars all expressed their own views on what was good and what was bad, but Master Jung Feng still replied...

Master Jung-Fung: ...not necessarily.

Liao-Fan: Since Master Jung Feng disagreed with all of their views on good and bad, they decided to ask the Master himself.

Scholars: So what is really considered good, and what is really considered bad?

Master Jung-Fung: To do things with the intention of bringing benefit to others is good, to do things for the sake of oneself is bad. If what we do is for the sake of benefiting another, then it does not matter if we yell at or beat that person, it is still considered good. If our intention is for self-benefit, then regardless of our appearance of respect and courtesy, it is still considered bad.

Therefore, when we practice kind deeds with the sole intention of benefiting others, this is considered benefiting the public, and if it is public, then it is real goodness. If we only think of ourselves while doing kind acts, then that is considered private benefit and that is false goodness.

When kindness springs from within the heart, it is real goodness. When we do good just for the sake of doing a good deed then it is false. In addition, when we do good without expecting anything in return, it is considered real goodness. When we practice kind deeds for some other purpose than to benefit others, it is false. Those who wish

to practice true kindness need to contemplate all these differences.

Liao-Fan: What is ‘honest goodness and crooked goodness’? People nowadays often look upon an extremely conservative and nice person as good and kind. However, the ancient sages and saints have shown that they prefer those who are courageous and hold high goals for themselves.

Narrator: This is because those with courage and high goals are easier to teach and guide and will someday reach accomplishment in life, while those who are *overly* careful and conservative will never amount to anything.

Liao-Fan: As for those who appear to be conservative and careful in their everyday actions, they may be liked by all, but because of their weak personality, they easily go along with everything, unable to think for themselves. Sages often speak of them as thieves of virtue. From this, we can see that the viewpoint of ordinary people greatly differs from that of the sages and saints.

Narrator: What ordinary people may view as goodness, a saint may in fact proclaim to be bad. What appears to be bad to ordinary people, a saint may perceive as true kindness.

Liao-Fan: This applies to other matters as well. Earth, spirits, heavens and gods all look upon good and bad from the same viewpoint as the sages. Kind people will be rewarded for kind deeds and the wicked person will suffer

for their wrongdoing. Whatever the sages perceive as right, they too see the same way. They do not view things from the same perspective, as do ordinary people.

Therefore, those who wish to accumulate merits must not be deceived and affected by the sights and sounds of the world. Instead, they need to practice with a true and humble heart, not to please others and acquire respect. One would do well to protect one's heart from deviant and impure thoughts.

Narrator: Honest goodness comes from the thought to help all others. Crooked goodness arises from the thought of greed in wishing only to please people. Harboring love for others is being honest. Harboring thoughts of hatred and jealousy is being crooked. Honest goodness is when one is respectful and crooked goodness is when one acts without sincerity.

Liao-Fan: These are all to be carefully differentiated. What is 'hidden goodness and visible goodness'?

Narrator: When one does something good and people know about it, it is called visible goodness. When one does something good and no one knows about it, it is called hidden virtue.

Liao-Fan: Those with hidden virtues will naturally be known by the heavens and will be rewarded. Those who practice visible goodness will be known by people and will enjoy fame.

Narrator: Fame itself is good fortune, but heaven and earth do not favor fame for heaven and earth do not favor those who seek fame.

Liao Fan: We can see that those who have great fame, but lack the virtues supporting it, will eventually encounter some kind of overwhelming adversity. A person who truly has not done any wrong but continues to be falsely accused by others will have descendants who will suddenly become prosperous and successful.

Narrator: From this, we can see how important it is to understand the minute differences between hidden and visible goodness. We cannot afford to mistake them!

Liao-Fan: In performing good deeds, there is also what seems to be goodness but is actually not and what does not appear to be goodness but actually is. These are known as ‘seeming and unseeming goodness’.

For example, in the Spring-Autumn Period, there was a country named Lu. Because there were other countries which took their citizens as slaves or servants, the country of Lu made a law which rewarded those who paid the ransom to regain the freedom of their fellow citizens. At that time, Confucius had a very rich student named Dz-Gong. Although Dz-Gong paid the ransom to free his people, he did not accept the reward for doing such a deed.

Narrator: He did it out of good intention, seeking only to help others and not for the reward money.

Liao Fan: But when Confucius heard this, he was very unhappy and scolded him saying...

Confucius: You acted wrongly in this matter. When sages and saints undertake anything, they strive to improve the social behavior, teaching people to be good and decent. One does not do something just because one feels like it. In the country of Lu, the poor outnumber the wealthy. By refusing the reward, you lead others to think that accepting the reward money is being greedy.

Thus, those who do not want to appear greedy by accepting the government's reward will hesitate to pay ransom in the future. Only very rich people will have a chance to practice this deed. If this happens, no one will pay the ransom to free our people again.

Liao-Fan: Another student of Confucius, Dz-Lu, once saw a man drowning in the river and rescued him. Later, the man thanked him by giving him a cow as a token of gratitude. Dz-Lu accepted his gift. Confucius was happy when he heard this and said...

Confucius: In the future, people will be willing and eager to help those who are drowning in deep waters or lakes.

Liao-Fan: If we look from the view of ordinary people, Dz-Gong, who did not accept the reward money, was good. Dz-Lu, who accepted the cow, was not as good. Who would have known that Confucius would praise Dz-Lu and instead scold Dz-gong? From this, we can see that

those who practice kind deeds must not only look at the present outcome...

Narrator: ...but also consider the act's effect in the long run.

Liao Fan: One would do well to not only consider one's own gain and loss...

Narrator: ...but look to see the impact made on the public.

Liao Fan: What we do right now may be good...

Narrator: ...but with the passing years, it may bring harm to others.

Liao Fan: Therefore, what seems like goodness may in fact be the opposite and what appears to be the opposite of goodness, may someday turn out to have been goodness after all. There are other examples of seeming goodness but actually is unseemingly.

Narrator: There are many things that people apparently ought to do, but sometimes these things prove to be better left undone. Forgiveness is a virtue, but it cannot be used without reason and wisdom. If we easily forgive and release a criminal when he or she has not regretted and reformed, we may be letting loose a threat to society, causing more harm than good. In this case, forgiveness would be improper and the person would be best left in his or her cell.

Liao-Fan: We all need to have manners, but they are to be carried out with good sense. Overdoing courtesy to others can result in making them proud and arrogant. In this case, it would not be a good thing.

Narrator: Keeping one's word is a virtue, but if one causes bigger trouble through keeping a small promise, then that would be considered improper.

Liao Fan: Being loving and compassionate is a wonderful trait, but if compassion is carried out by allowing anything to be done, then the spoiled person would become daring and unrestrained, causing greater harm and trouble in the future. This would be most unmerciful.

Narrator: These are all examples of what appears to be goodness but actually is not and are to be thoroughly contemplated.

Liao-Fan: What is 'proper goodness and improper goodness'? In the Ming Dynasty, there once was a Prime Minister named Wen-Yi Lyu, who was a just and lawful man. When he grew old, he retired to his hometown where he was loved and respected by all the people. Once, a drunken villager went to his home and proceeded to insult him. Mr. Lyu was not angered by his words but instead told his servant...

Mr. Lyu: This man is drunk. Let's not give him a hard time.

Liao-Fan: With this, he closed the door and ignored the onslaught of insults. A year later, the same man committed

a grave crime and was sent to jail with the death sentence. Upon hearing this, Mr. Lyu said with great remorse...

Mr. Lyu: If I had taken him to the authorities for punishment that day when he came to insult me, perhaps this would not have happened. A little discipline then could have prevented the great harm done now and might have saved him from certain death. At that time, I was only thinking of being kind and unknowingly nurtured a defiant and disgraceful personality. Since nothing came from his deed of insulting a Prime Minister, he grew bold and went on committing crimes, which have now brought him the death penalty.

Liao-Fan: This is an example of doing something bad while having good intentions. There is also an example of those who did good when they in fact intended otherwise. Once, a famine devastated the land and people stole food from others in broad daylight. A rich family reported these losses from the marketplace to the authorities. However, the government, not wanting to get involved, did nothing to stop the thieves. Eventually, they grew more daring and chaos was imminent. So, the rich family took the law into their own hands and proceeded to catch and punish those who stole from them. In this way, peace resumed and people no longer stole from one another. It was with selfish intentions that the rich family acted, but the result of their deeds actually greatly benefited everyone.

Narrator: Therefore, we all know that goodness is proper and wrongdoing is improper. However, there are cases where deeds done out of good intentions resulted in bad and deeds done with bad intentions resulted in good. This is saying that although the intention was proper, it resulted in the improper. This is the ‘improper within the proper.’ However, there is also the case when the improper was intended but resulted in the proper. This is called the ‘proper within the improper.’

Liao-Fan: We can all benefit from understanding this. What is ‘half goodness and whole goodness’? The I Ching, Book of Change said...

Narrator: "People who do not accumulate kind deeds will not attain good fortune. On the other hand, people who do not accumulate bad deeds will not bring about great adversity."

Liao-Fan: The accumulation of kind and bad deeds greatly determines our future. If we are diligent in doing kind deeds, it is like collecting things in a container. With diligence, it will soon be full and we will have our reward of good fortune. If we are eager in the accumulation of bad deeds and gather *them* with great diligence, then the container of bad will soon be full and disasters will surely occur.

If we are somewhat lazy in our collecting of either kindness or misdeeds, then the container will be left half filled and neither good fortune nor adversity will come

swiftly. This is one explanation of whole goodness and half goodness.

Once there was a poor lady who went to visit a Buddhist temple and wished to make a donation. However, she was so poor that she had only two cents but she gave these to a monk. To her surprise, the temple's abbot himself came forth to help her regret for past offenses and dedicate her merits in front of the Buddha.

Later, the same lady was chosen to enter the imperial palace and became a concubine to the emperor. Clad in her riches, the lady once again went to the temple to donate, this time bringing thousands of silver pieces to give. To her dismay, the abbot only sent another monk to help her dedicate her merits. The lady did not understand and questioned the abbot...

Lady: In the past, I only donated two cents, yet you personally helped me express my regret. Today I come with great wealth to give and you will not help me perform my dedication. Why?

Abbot: Although the amount of money you gave in the past was small, it came from a true and sincere heart. It was necessary for me to repay your sincerity by personally performing your dedications. Today, although your donation is much more, the heart of giving is not quite as true and sincere as before. Therefore, it is fitting and enough that my student performs your dedications for you.

Liao-Fan: This is an example of how thousands of silver pieces are only considered as half goodness and two cents as whole.

Another example is of Li Jung, an immortal of the Han Dynasty. He was teaching his student, Dong-Bing Lyu, the art of transforming steel into gold. They would use this gold to help the poor. Dong-Bing asked his teacher...

Dong-Bing: Will the gold ever change back to steel again?

Li Jung: After five hundred years, it will return to its original form.

Dong-Bing: In that case, I do not want to learn this art, it will harm those who possess the gold five hundred years from now.

Liao-Fan: In actuality, Li Jung was only testing the goodness of his student's heart and happy with the results, he said...

Li Jung: To become an immortal, one must complete three thousand virtuous deeds. What you have just said came from a truly kind heart; your three thousand deeds are fulfilled!

Liao-Fan: This is another example of whole goodness and half goodness. When we perform a kind deed, it is best if we can do it out of our innermost sincerity, not seeking rewards or noting in our minds how much we have done. If we practice in this manner, then all our good deeds will reach fulfillment and success.

If, instead, we always think of the deeds we have performed, looking for a reward of some kind, then no matter how diligently we practice, even for an entire lifetime, the deeds will still be considered as half goodness.

Narrator: For example, when we donate money to the poor, we can practice what is called ‘pure donation.’ In this type of giving, we do not linger on the thought of ‘I’ who is giving; dwell on the importance of the object I am giving away; or think of who the receiver is. We are simply giving and it is out of true sincerity and respect. When we give with ‘pure donation’, then one *dou* of rice can bring boundless good fortune and the merit from giving one cent can wipe away the transgressions of a thousand eons.

Liao-Fan: If we always keep in mind the good we have done and expect rewards for our actions, then even a donation of two hundred thousand gold pieces would still not bear us the reward of a fully good fortune. This is another way of explaining whole goodness and half goodness.

What is ‘big goodness and small goodness’? Once there was a high ranking official named Jung-Da Wei, who was led into the spirit world to be judged for his good and bad deeds. The judge ordered his records of good and bad to be brought out. When the records arrived, Jung-Da was astounded at the courtyard full of his bad records and at the single scroll, which contained his good deeds. The

official then ordered the two to be weighed. Surprisingly, the bad records, which had filled the courtyard, were lighter than the single scroll of good deeds, which was as thin as a chopstick. Jung-Da asked the judge...

Jung-Da: I am barely forty years old, how could I have committed so many wrongdoings?

Judge: When you give rise to a single thought that is improper, it is considered a bad offense there and then, it does not have to be carried out through action to be counted as a wrong. For example, when you see a pretty woman and give rise to improper thoughts, that is considered an offense.

Liao-Fan: Jung-Da then asked him what was recorded in the single scroll of good deeds, which outweighed the bad deeds. The judge replied...

Judge: Once the Emperor planned to build a great stone bridge but you proposed against the project due to the hardship and toil it would cause the tens and thousands of people needed for the work. This is a copy of your proposal to the Emperor.

Jung-Da: I did make the proposal, but the Emperor dismissed it and began the project anyway. My proposal had no effect on the matter at all. How can it bear so much weight against my numerous offenses?

Judge: Although the Emperor did not accept your suggestion, that one thought of kindness you bore for the tens and thousands of people was very great. If the

Emperor had listened to you, then the good performed would have been even greater.

Liao-Fan: Therefore, when one is determined to do good for the benefit of all people, a small deed can reap great merits.

Narrator: If one thinks only about benefiting oneself, then even if many deeds of kindness are performed, the merits would still be small.

Liao-Fan: What is ‘difficult goodness and easy goodness’? The knowledgeable scholars of the past used to say...

Scholar: When one wishes to conquer one’s greed and desires, one should start with what is most difficult to overcome.

Liao-Fan: Fan-Chr, a student of Confucius, once asked his teacher how to cultivate one’s humanity to it’s fullest...

Confucius: Start with what is most difficult to practice.

Liao Fan: What Confucius meant by the most difficult, was to sever the selfish mind. One practices that by conquering what is most difficult for one to conquer. We can practice like the old teacher, Mr. Su of Chiangshi, who gave two years worth of salary to a poor family who owed money to the government. Thus he saved them from being torn apart should the husband be taken to prison.

Narrator: Another example is Mr. Jang from Herbei. Mr. Jang saw an extremely poor man who had to mortgage his

wife and child, and then had no money for their redemption. If he was unable to pay for their return, the mother and child could both lose their lives.

Liao-Fan: Therefore, Mr. Jang gave his ten years of savings to the poor man so the family could be reunited.

Narrator: Such examples as Mr. Su and Mr. Jang are rare, for they gave what is most difficult to give. What others could not sacrifice, they did so willingly.

Liao-Fan: Another example is Mr. Jin from Chiangsu Province. He was old and without any sons, so his neighbor offered their young daughter in marriage to him, to give him descendants to carry on his lineage. But Mr. Jin could not bear to ruin the otherwise bright and long future of this young girl, and so refused the offer and sent her back home.

Narrator: This is another example of being able to overcome what is most difficult to conquer in oneself. Therefore, the heavens showered down good fortune, which was especially good for these three old men.

Liao-Fan: It is easier for those who have money and power to accumulate merits and virtues than for those who are poor. However, if one refuses to cultivate kindness even when it is easy and when one has the chance to do so, then it would truly be a shame. For those who are poor and without prestige, doing kind things for others is very difficult. However, if in this difficulty one can still manage

to help others, then it is a great virtue and the merits gained will be boundless.

To be a moral person when interacting with others and affairs, we help whenever the opportunity presents itself. Helping others is not an easy task but there are many ways to do it. In short, the ways of helping others can be simplified into ten important categories. The first is ‘supporting the practice of kindness’.

Narrator: When we see people trying to show kindness, we can assist them and help their kindness to grow. When we see others who wish to do good but cannot accomplish it on their own, we can lend a hand and help them to succeed. This is the way we can cultivate ‘supporting the practice of kindness’.

Liao-Fan: The second category is ‘harboring love and respect’.

Narrator: We can harbor respect towards those who are more knowledgeable, older or in a higher position than we are. For those who are younger, less fortunate or of lower position, we can harbor a mind of loving care.

Liao-Fan: The third category is ‘helping others succeed’.

Narrator: When we see others who are considering whether or not to do a good deed, we can persuade them to put all their effort into doing it. When others meet with difficulties in practicing kindness, we can help think of ways to overcome the difficulty and guide them to success.

We must not be jealous at the accomplishments of others nor try to sabotage their good acts.

Liao-Fan: The fourth category is ‘persuading others to practice kindness’.

Narrator: When we meet a person who is doing wrong, we can point out that doing wrong will only result in great suffering and painful retribution, and that he or she needs to avoid doing so at all costs. We can tell people who refuse to practice kindness or are only willing to practice a little kindness, that doing kind deeds will definitely have its rewards. Kindness not only has to be cultivated, but also is to be cultivated constantly and on a large scale.

Liao-Fan: The fifth category is ‘helping those in desperate need’.

Narrator: Most people tend to give when there is no need to give and do not give when there really is a need. When we meet people who are in great difficulties, emergencies or dangers, we can lend them a hand and assist them in whatever way we can to help them out of their difficulties. The merits accrued from helping others in times of desperate need are boundless. However, one must not become proud and conceited because of doing such deeds.

Liao-Fan: The sixth category is ‘developing public projects for the greater benefit of the people.’

Narrator: Projects, which will bring great benefit to the public, usually have to be performed by those with great influence and power. If a person has this capacity, such as

rebuilding the water system or assisting a disaster area, then it ought to be done for the benefit of the public. Those without such influence and power can do great deeds, too. For example, when one sees a small leak in a dam, one can use pebbles and dirt to stop the water and prevent disastrous flooding. Though this act may be small, the effect will not go unnoticed.

Liao-Fan: The seventh category is ‘giving through donation.’

Narrator: People of this world love, seek and even die for money. Who is actually willing to help others by giving their own money away? When we recognize the difficulty involved in donation, we can come to appreciate the rarity of the person who is willing to give to help others in need. This person is even greater in the eyes of the poor.

According to the Law of Cause and Effect, "those who give will in turn receive", and "those who refuse to give will not receive." When we cultivate one share of kindness, we will receive one share of good fortune, there is no need to worry about having nothing left when we give to help others.

Liao-Fan: The eighth category is ‘protecting the proper teachings.’

Narrator: We must be able to differentiate between proper teachings and deviant teachings. Deviant teachings do great harm to people’s minds and hearts and naturally are to be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, teachings

with proper wisdom and views, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, the Ten Commandments, etc., which promote kindness and goodness in society, are to be supported.

Almost every culture has these basic proper teachings. If one happens to see others in the act of destroying such proper teachings, one must put forth every effort to protect and uphold these teachings.

Liao-Fan: The ninth category is ‘respecting our elders.’

Narrator: Anyone who is deeply learned, knowledgeable, has high prestige, or is older than us can be considered an elder and is to be highly regarded and respected.

Liao-Fan: The tenth category is ‘loving and cherishing all living things.’

Narrator: We should feel sympathy for all living creatures, even the tiny ants, who know of suffering and are afraid to die. How can we kill and eat living beings and not feel the least bit sorry?

Liao Fan: Some people even say that these things were meant for human consumption...

Narrator: ...but there is no logic in this argument and it is only an excuse for those who desire to eat meat.

Liao-Fan: I have only explained the above ten categories in summary, now I will explain each in detail and give examples. What does ‘supporting the practice of kindness’ mean?

In the Yu Dynasty, there once was an emperor by the name of Shwun. One day, before he became emperor, Shwun was watching some fishermen on Lake Leize. He noticed that all the younger and stronger fishermen took the spots where the water was deep and the fish were abundant, while the older and weaker fishermen were left with the rapids and shallow water, where there were very few fish.

When Shwun saw this situation, he felt sympathy for the older and weaker fishermen and thought of a way to turn the situation around. He decided to join in the fishing party to set an example for the others. Whenever he saw fishermen plunder good fishing spots, he would conceal their faults and never even spoke of their selfishness.

When he saw those who were humble and yielding, he praised them everywhere he went and even followed their humble and polite ways. Shwun stayed and fished like this for a whole year until the other fishermen got into the habit of yielding good fishing spots to others.

Narrator: This story of Shwun is only an example to show how a person influences others through his actions and not through his speech. It is not meant to encourage people to fish, because fishing is an act of killing. Please refrain from sports, which take the lives of others.

Liao-Fan: A wise and intelligent man such as Shwun could have easily influenced others with a few words of advice. Why didn't he just say something instead of personally joining the gathering?

Narrator: Shwun did not want to use words, but preferred to set an example for others through his actions. Shwun wanted those fishermen to feel ashamed of their own selfish behavior and change on their own accord. This shows how deep and sincere Shwun's wish was for others to practice kindness.

Liao-Fan: In today's era of low morality, social breakdown and loss of proper thinking, it is most difficult to find a good standard of behavior. Therefore, when those around us have shortcomings...

Narrator:we do not use our good points to highlight their deficiencies.

Liao Fan: When the other person is unkind...

Narrator: ...we do not use our kindness to measure or compare ourselves to them.

Liao Fan: When others are not as capable as we are...

Narrator: ...we do not purposely surpass them with our abilities.

Liao Fan: Even when we are intelligent and competent, these skills are to be kept hidden and not boasted of. Instead, we then behave even more humbly than ever. We thus look upon our skills and abilities as unimportant, false and unreal. When someone makes a mistake, we tolerate it and conceal it, giving him or her a chance to reform without losing their self-respect.

When we let the person keep his or her dignity, this person will be even more careful of actions in the future. When we see strengths and kindness in others, we can learn from them, praise them and make their goodness known to others. In daily life, we can refrain from speaking and acting with selfish intentions, but instead seek to benefit society and the public. We can make beneficial laws and regulations for the public to follow.

Narrator: These are the qualities of a great person, who thinks of the public welfare as more important than his or her own.

Liao-Fan: What is meant by ‘harboring love and respect for others’? Sometimes it is hard to tell from appearance whether one is an honorable person or a fraud, since frauds can pretend to be honorable. The difference lies in their intentions. An honorable person’s intentions are good while a fraud’s intentions are bad. There is a great distance between the two and they are as different as black and white. Mencius said that...

Mencius: The difference between truly honorable people and ordinary people lies in their intentions.

Liao-Fan: A truly honorable person’s heart is only filled with love and respect for others. There are thousands of different types of people in this world, some close to us, some strangers, some in high positions and some in low, some smart while others are not, and some virtuous and

some corrupt, but nevertheless, they are our fellow humanity.

They are like us, alive with flesh and blood and with feelings. There is not a single person whom I should hate or disrespect. When our hearts are full of love and respect for others, it is the same as if our heart is full of love and respect for the saints and sages. When we understand others, it is the same as if we understand the saints and sages. Why?

Narrator: Because all the saints and sages want the people on this earth to lead happy and productive lives.

Liao-Fan: Therefore, if we can love and respect people and help them to be peaceful and happy, we are doing the job of a sage or a saint.

What does ‘helping others to succeed’ mean? If we cast away raw jade, then this stone would be like any other worthless stone.

Narrator: But if we were to carve and polish it, it could be transformed into a priceless jewel.

Liao Fan: It is the same with people. A person needs to be taught and guided, just as jade needs to be carved and polished. When we see people whom we feel have good potential for doing a good deed or working towards a proper goal, we can guide, support, praise and encourage them, helping them succeed in their endeavors.

If another ever wrongly accuses them, we can try to clear their name and share their burden of slander. Only when we have helped them stand on their feet and be a part of good society will we have fulfilled our responsibility in helping others to succeed.

Most people dislike those who are different from them, such as a fraud versus an honorable person and a bad person versus a good person. In villages, there are usually more bad people than virtuous ones.

Narrator: Since there are always more bad people around, good people are often taken advantage of. Therefore good people often has a hard time standing on their own.

Liao Fan: Frankness and modesty are the usual characteristics of good people. They usually do not care much for their appearance. On the other hand, an average uneducated person often only pays attention to another's appearance. They like to gossip and make accusations; so, striving to do good turns out to be quite a challenge. A good person can easily be wrongly accused. When this happens, it is entirely up to the goodness and virtue of an elder to correct the actions of those who are bad and guide them back to the right track.

Narrator: It is also up to these elders to protect and help those who are good and need to stand on their own. Those who can preserve good and be rid of wrongdoings achieve the highest merit.

Liao-Fan: What is meant by ‘persuading others to practice kindness’? We all have a conscience, but chasing after wealth and fame has kept us constantly busy and forgetful of our good conscience. We have become willing to stoop very low, as long there is something to be gained from it. When a friend is about to ignore his or her good conscience to do something unworthy, we can remind and warn this friend, hoping to wake him or her from this muddled state of mind.

Narrator: It is like waking up someone when they are having a nightmare, it is up to us shake them into reality. When a person is undergoing a long spell of depression, we can pull this person out of it and help to clear his or her mind.

Liao Fan: We are most virtuous if we can treat our friends with such kindness. A scholar named Han once said...

Scholar Han: By word of mouth, one can only persuade and influence another momentarily. It is easily forgotten with the passing of time and events. No one else would have heard what we have said. If we can persuade and influence others through written works, our words can be passed on for hundreds of generations around the world. Therefore, writing to promote virtue is an act of great speech and is a most virtuous deed.

Liao-Fan: We can persuade others by word of mouth as well as by writing books to promote virtue. Compared with the previous category of helping others to succeed,

this is much more direct and obvious. However, the treatment of an illness with the right medicine sometimes proves to have special effects; therefore, we cannot give up.

Narrator: It is also important how we do it. For instance, if a person is too stubborn, we do not persuade him or her with words. If we do, then we are wasting both our words and energy. If a person is gentle and willing to listen, but we fail to persuade him or her, then we have just missed an excellent opportunity to do good.

Either way is because we are not wise enough to tell the difference. We should then reflect to see what we did wrong so the next time we will do it right and will not waste any more words nor lose another opportunity.

Liao-Fan: What is meant by ‘helping those in desperate need’? During one’s lifetime, people will often suffer from serious problems, financial troubles or separation from loved ones. If we meet someone like this, we can help that person as if we are the one who is experiencing the suffering. We immediately come to this person’s aid. If a person has been wrongly accused or convicted, we should plead for this person’s innocence as well as provide aid in any way we can. Scholar Suai once said...

Scholar Suai: It does not matter whether a favor is big or small; what counts is that it is done at a time when others need it most.

Liao-Fan: What humane words! What is meant by ‘developing public projects for the greater benefit of the people’? Small construction works are needed for villages and big construction jobs are needed for cities. Public projects are anything that need to be constructed for the public welfare...

Narrator: Such as irrigation systems for farm lands, dams, bridges, or giving food and water to those who are hungry or thirsty.

Liao Fan: Whenever we have the opportunity, we need to persuade others to do their share as well. Even when others slander or talk behind our back we should not be deterred. Do not be afraid of what others might say and do not get scared when the job becomes difficult. Do not let people’s jealousy and hatred shake our resolve to do kind deeds.

Liao-Fan: What is meant by ‘giving through donation’? In Buddhism, giving is considered foremost in all practices of kindness. When one truly understands the meaning of giving and is willing to give away all worldly belongings, even to the point of donating parts from one’s own body, then this person is walking the way of the Buddha. A person who understands this principle would be willing to give away anything, even to the point of donating eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind.

Narrator: For instance, in a past life, Buddha Shakyamuni offered his own body as food for a hungry

tiger.

Liao Fan: One can also give away sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and Dharma. There is nothing a person cannot give away if he or she is willing.

Narrator: If a person can do this, then he is on his way to gaining purity of mind and body. He will have no worries or afflictions, just like the Buddha.

Liao Fan: When we find ourselves unable to give away everything, we can start by donating money. Worldly people treat their clothing and food as dearly as their lives. Therefore, monetary donation is most important for them.

Narrator: When we practice giving without hesitation, we can cure stinginess and at the same time help others in need.

Liao Fan: However, for many it is not an easy thing to do. It is difficult at first, but becomes more natural the more we give. From cultivating giving, peace of mind can be attained, and then there is nothing we cannot give away. This is the best way to cure a bad case of selfishness and an opportunity to change our attitudes toward money and worldly possessions.

Liao-Fan: What is meant by ‘protecting the proper teachings’?

Narrator: For millions of years, proper teachings have been a standard of truth and a spiritual guide for all living beings.

Liao Fan: If we do not have good strong beliefs, how can we join in and support the interaction of heaven and earth? How can people of all walks of life succeed in their endeavors without a standard to live by? How would we be able to escape from delusion and life's confinement? How would we create and arrange worldly affairs and transcend the cycle of birth and death?

Narrator: These all depend on good and proper teachings as the lighted path.

Liao Fan: Therefore, whenever we see temples, memorials of past saints or sages, pictures of sages, or Buddhist texts, we should be respectful. If they are in need of repair, we should repair and put them back in order. We can especially tell people about the teachings of the Buddha and widely spread the proper teachings. We can let others know of its value, in this way we are also showing our gratitude towards the sages and the Buddhas. We need to do all we can to reach this goal.

Liao-Fan: What is meant by 'respecting our elders'? It is making an extra effort in showing our attention and respect towards parents, elder siblings, the governor, our superiors or any elders of high virtue, prestige and learning.

Narrator: When taking care of parents at home, we are to do it with love in our hearts and a gentle, accommodating appearance. We should not raise our voice but maintain a peaceful bearing. As we cultivate these virtues, they will

become a part of us and we will change into a mild-mannered person. This is the way we can touch the hearts of heaven and evoke a response.

Liao Fan: When carrying out deeds for our superiors or the government, we should follow the rules even when we are not obliged to. We should not try to slack off just because our superiors do not know what we are doing.

Before we convict someone of a crime, regardless of whether the crime is serious or not, we should investigate carefully and handle the case with justice. We should not abuse the power and rights given to us by our superiors.

Narrator: When one faces the emperor, one should show him the same respect as if one were facing the heavens. This is the correct behavior handed down from our ancestors. It has a direct and important effect on one's hidden goodness.

Liao-Fan: Look at all the families who practiced loyalty and filial piety. Their descendants prosper for a long time and have bright futures. Therefore, we can follow their example and practice with caution.

Liao-Fan: What is meant by 'loving and cherishing all living things'? A heart of compassion is what makes a good person. Mencius once said...

Mencius: A person is not human if he or she does not feel compassion.

Liao-Fan: A person in search of the virtues of mercy and kindness looks out for his or her heart of compassion. A person who wants to accumulate merits also cultivates a compassionate heart. A person with compassion is a kind, virtuous and merciful person, while one without compassion for others is unkind and without morals. It is stated in The Ethical Code of the Chu Dynasty:

Narrator: "In January, when most animals are bearing young, female species are not to be used for sacrificial purposes."

Liao-Fan: Mencius once said...

Mencius: An honorable person will not live near the kitchen.

Liao-Fan: This is to protect a compassionate heart, since a lot of slaughtering is done in the kitchen. Therefore, our ancestors did not eat meat under four circumstances. First is if they heard the killing, second is if they saw the killing, third is if the animal was raised by them and fourth is if the animal was killed for their sake. If you are not vegetarian but wish to cultivate compassion, then you can learn from our ancestors by eating less meat.

Narrator: According to the Buddha's teachings, living beings are born as animals as a result of having accumulated bad karma in their previous lives. After they pay their debt in retribution, they can be born as humans again. If they are willing to cultivate they can even become Buddhas. The meat I eat today may be the flesh of

a future Buddha. An animal we see today was formerly a person. It is then possible that this animal was my parent, wife, son, a relative or a friend.

Presently, I am human and they are animals. To kill and eat them would be making enemies of those I used to love. If I eat them today, in the future they may become a human again when I become an animal due to my violations of killing. In their revenge, I will have to undergo the same suffering of being killed and eaten.

When we think this way, how dare we kill? How can we swallow a piece of that flesh? Besides, even if the meat does taste good, the taste only lasts from the mouth to the throat. After we swallow, there is nothing left to taste. There is no difference between eating meat and vegetables, why would we want to kill when there is no good behind it?

Liao-Fan: Even if we cannot stop eating meat immediately, we can still try to gradually reduce our meat intake until vegetarianism is accomplished. In this way, we can reach a higher state of compassion within our heart. Also, we need to refrain from killing any living creature, even insects. Man makes silk from the cocoons of silkworms. The cocoons have to be boiled in water first, with the silkworms inside. Think about it, how many silkworms lose their lives in the process?

When we cultivate the land for farming, how many insects have to be killed? We need to be aware of the cost in lives

involved in our everyday food and clothing. We kill to provide for ourselves. Therefore, we need to be conservative and value the food and clothing we have. To waste them would create the same violation as killing.

How often have we unknowingly harmed or stepped on a living creature? With a little awareness, we can prevent this from happening. Tung-Pwo Su, a great poet from the Sung Dynasty once wrote...

Tung-Pwo Su: In love of the mice, we often leave him some rice. In pitying the moth, we won't light the lamp.

Liao-Fan: What a kind and compassionate statement! There are infinite types of goodness. I cannot mention them all. As long as we can expand on the ten previous categories, we can make them into a multitude of good deeds and virtues.

The Fourth Lesson: The Benefit of the Virtue of Humility

Narrator: The third lesson taught us the ways to accumulate kind deeds. Naturally, it would be best if people would practice kindness, but as humans, we are social beings. It is impossible not to encounter others; therefore, it is important to know the ways to improve ourselves when interacting with others.

The best way to do this is to follow the virtue of humility. Humble people in society receive support and trust from the public. If they understand the virtue of humility, they also will understand the importance of constant self-improvement. This constant self-improvement not only includes the search for higher knowledge, but also encompasses the need to be more humane, to perform better in daily duties and to improve communication with friends.

Many benefits and rewards result from behaving with an understanding of humility. This lesson focuses on the benefits of virtue and humility, proven by Liao-Fan's own experiences. A people will greatly benefit if they can thoroughly contemplate and understand these teachings.

Liao-Fan: In The I Ching/Book of Change, the hexagram of Humility stated...

Narrator: "The law of heaven takes from those who are arrogant and benefits those who are humble. The law of earth will not allow those who are conceited or self-content to always remain that way, but will bring change to them. The humble will not wither, but shall be replenished, just as flowing water fills lower places on the ground as it passes by. The law of spirits and gods brings harm to those who are arrogant and good fortune to those who are humble. Even the laws of people despise the arrogant and like the humble."

Liao-Fan: Therefore, earth, spirits, heaven, gods and people all prefer humility to arrogance. In The I Ching, Book of Change, the sixty-four hexagrams talk about the constant changes and interactions of heaven and earth, yin and yang. The book teaches a person how to become more humane. Every hexagram contains both good and bad outcomes.

The bad outcomes of a hexagram warn people to stop doing misdeeds and to practice kind deeds. The good outcomes of a hexagram encourage people to diligently improve themselves and strive to be better. Only the Humility hexagram contains all good outcomes and no bad outcomes. The Chinese Book of History has also said...

Narrator: "One's arrogance will bring one harm; humility will bring one benefit."

Liao-Fan: I often went to take the exams accompanied by others and every time I would meet scholars who were very poor. I noticed that before they succeeded in passing the exams and became prosperous, their faces showed such humility, peace and harmony that I felt I could almost hold that quality in my hands.

Several years ago, I took my imperial exam in Beijing. Among the ten applicants from my village, Ching-Yu Ding was the youngest and extremely humble. I told one of the applicants, Jin-Po Fay, that this young man would definitely pass the exam this year. Jin-Po Fay asked...

Jin-Po: How can you tell?

Liao-Fan: I said, "Only those who are humble are qualified to receive good fortune. My friend, look at the ten of us; is there anyone as honest, generous and never tries to come in first, as Ching-Yu? Do you see anyone who is always respectful, tolerant, careful and humble like Ching-Yu? Do you see anyone like Ching-Yu, who, when insulted, does not talk back, or who, when slandered, does not argue? Any person who can achieve such a level of humility will receive protection from the earth, spirits and heavens. There is no reason he will not become prosperous."

Narrator: Sure enough, when the test results came out, Ching-Yu Ding passed.

Liao-Fan: One year in Beijing, I was staying with my childhood friend, Kai-Zhi Fung. I noticed that he always carried himself in a humble way with a kind and accommodating appearance. He was not a bit arrogant, which was an immense change from his childhood ways. Kai-Zhi had a friend named Ji-Yen Li who was straightforward and honest. Ji-Yen often scolded him on his mistakes, but Kai-Zhi always accepted the accusations calmly without talking back.

I told him, "Just as there are signs that warn of coming misfortune, we can see that prosperity comes to those who have cultivated the cause for it. Heaven will help those whose hearts are humble. You, my friend, will definitely pass the imperial examination this year!" Later, he indeed passed the exam.

There was a young man from Santong Province named Yu-Fong Zhou who passed the first level of imperial examinations before he was even twenty. Unfortunately, try as he might, he could not pass the succeeding exams. When his father was moved to another post in the government, Yu-Fong went with him, and came to greatly admire a well-known scholar in that village named Min-Wu Chian.

Yu-Fong brought his essays to this man. He had no idea that Mr. Chian would pick up his calligraphy brush and blot out his entire essay. Not only was Yu-Fong *not* angry, he sincerely accepted all of Mr. Chian's corrections and immediately changed his paper accordingly.

Narrator: A young man who could be that humble and who showed such willingness to improve himself was very rare indeed. The following year, Yu-Fong passed the imperial examination.

Liao-Fan: One year, I went to the Capital to pay my respects to the Emperor. I met a scholar named Jian-Suo Hsia who had all the qualities of a great man without a trace of arrogance. I felt the intense aura of his virtue and humility all about him.

When I returned home, I told my friend, "When heaven wants a person to prosper, it will first bestow him with wisdom. Wisdom can make a person honest and well disciplined. Heaven has already bestowed Jian-Suo with wisdom, or he could not be that gentle, kind and good.

Surely, heaven will now make him prosperous." Sure enough, when the test results came out, Jian-Suo had passed the exam.

There was a scholar named Wei-Yan Chang from Jiangying who was very learned and wrote good essays. He was also very well known among many scholars. One year he took his exam at Nanjing and stayed at a Taoist temple.

When the results were posted, he found that he had not passed the exam. He became furious and loudly accused the examiner of being blind for not recognizing his obvious talents. At that time, a Taoist monk stood by smiling and Wei-Yan immediately directed his anger towards the monk. The monk said...

Monk: Your essay must not be good!

Liao-Fan: Wei-Yan got even angrier.

Wei-Yan: How do you know it is not good when you have not even read it?

Monk: I often hear people say that the most important element in writing good essays is a peaceful heart and harmonious temperament. Your loud and angry accusations just now clearly show that your mind is certainly not at peace and your temperament is violent. How could you possibly write good essays?

Liao-Fan: Wei-Yan acceded to the Taoist monk's words and in turn asked him for his advice. The monk said...

Monk: Whether you pass or not depends on your fate. If you are destined not to pass, then no matter how good your paper is, you will still fail the exam. You yourself will have to make a few changes!

Wei-Yan: How can I change something that is predestined?

Monk: Though the power to form your destiny lies in the heavens, the right to recreate it is in yourself. As long as you are willing to do kind deeds and cultivate hidden virtues, you will receive what you ask for.

Wei-Yan: I am only a poor scholar. What good deeds can I possibly do?

Monk: Practicing kind deeds and accumulating hidden virtues all stem from the heart. As long as you constantly harbor the intent to practice kindness and accumulate virtues, your merits will be infinite and boundless! Take the virtue of humility for example, it does not cost anything; why can't you be humble and reflect on your own essay instead of blaming the examiner for being unfair?

Liao-Fan: Wei-Yan Chang listened to the Taoist monk and from then on, suppressed his arrogant ways. He became very mindful of his own actions and tried not to make mistakes. Everyday he put forth additional effort to do more good deeds and accumulate more merits.

Three years later, he dreamed one night that he entered a very tall house and saw a book that contained all the

names of the applicants who passed the exam that year. He saw many blank lines. Unable to understand what it meant, he asked the person next to him...

Wei-Yan: What is this?

Person: This book contains all the names of the applicants who passed the exam this year.

Wei-Yan: Why does it have so many blank lines?

Person: The spirits of the underworld check on the applicants every three years. Only the names of those who practice kind deeds and do not make mistakes are allowed to appear in this book. The blank lines used to bear the names of those who were supposed to pass the exam, but due to their recent offenses, their names have been erased.

Liao-Fan: Then, pointing to a line, the person said...

Person: Ah-ha, for the past three years you have been very careful and have exerted such self-control that you have not made any mistakes. Perhaps you should fill this blank. I hope you will cherish this opportunity and take care not to make any mistakes!

Narrator: Sure enough, Wei-Yan passed the exam that year and placed 105th.

Liao-Fan: From the examples given above, we know that spirits and gods are always watching our behavior.

Narrator: Therefore, we must immediately do whatever is beneficial to others and avoid doing whatever is violent, dangerous or harmful to others. These are all things I can

decide for myself. As long as I harbor good intentions; refrain from wrongdoings; do not offend the earth, spirits, heavens, and gods; humble myself; am tolerant and not arrogant; then the earth, spirits, heavens and gods will constantly have compassion for me. Only then will I have a foundation for my future prosperity.

Those who are full of conceit are definitely not destined to be great. Even if they do prosper, they will not be able to enjoy their good fortune for long. Intelligent people would definitely not make themselves small and narrow-minded and refuse the good fortune they are entitled to.

Narrator: Besides, those who are humble always increase their opportunities to learn. If a person were not humble, who would want to teach him or her? In addition, humble people are always willing to learn the strengths of others. When others perform good deeds, humble people will learn and follow their examples. In this way, the kind deeds that humble people can accomplish are boundless! For those who wish to cultivate and improve upon their virtues, they especially, cannot do without the virtue of humility.

Liao-Fan: The ancients had and an old saying...

Narrator: "Those who have their hearts set on attaining success and fame, will surely attain success and fame. Those who have their hearts set on attaining wealth and position, will surely attain wealth and position."

Liao-Fan: A person who has great and far-reaching goals is like a tree having roots. A tree with roots will eventually sprout into branches, leaves and flowers. A person who has set down great and far reaching goals must be humble in every thought and try to relieve another's burden even if the occurrence is as insignificant as a speck of dust.

Narrator: If one can reach this level of humility, one will naturally touch the hearts of earth and heaven.

Liao-Fan: Furthermore, I am the creator of my own prosperity; if I truly want to create it, I will certainly succeed. Look at the applicants who sought fame and wealth. In the beginning, they did not harbor a sincere heart; it was only a passing notion. When they fancied it, they sought it. When their interest dropped, they stopped. Mencius once told Emperor Shuan Chi...

Mencius: Your Highness has a love for music. However, your love for music is only a personal pleasure. If you can expand from the heart, which seeks personal happiness to that of sharing happiness with all your subjects and make them just as happy as you are, then, surely the nation is bound to prosper!

Liao-Fan: I think it is the same for those who are seeking to improve their lives by changing their destiny. I, for example wanted to pass the imperial exams. If people can expand the heart to diligently do kind deeds, accumulate merits, and put forth their best efforts into character

improvement, then both destiny and prosperity will be theirs to create.